LIBERAL EDUCATION AS FORMATION FOR THE HABIT OF DISTANCE

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Education should be one even though there are various educational levels. As Comenius already realized three and a half centuries ago, it is advisable to distinguish between very different experiences within the educational system but that the whole of this system meets or should meet one single objective (Garin 1968: 213). This objective should be to educate each new generation so that it understands the reality of the adult world it is about to enter, step by step, and accepts responsibility for it in order to be capable of continuing with it and modify it. Continuing with it means identifying with this world and getting used to it; modifying it, distancing oneself from it and experiencing it with at least a certain uneasiness.

The first stages of education, those of primary and secondary levels, concern children and adolescents. These are the stages of what is called general education. Hannah Arendt had these stages of education in mind when she wrote some very thought-provoking pages in her essay on "The crisis of education" (Arendt 1977: 173-196). Arendt states that the key to education lies in natality, that is to say in the phenomenon of the continuous appearance of new generations who enter the world and have to find their way in it. This world is given to them by previous generations. They are responsible for the world they have made and which they hand over to the next generation. They educate the next generations from a position of authority which is the form taken by their responsibility for the world they are passing on to the next generation.

For this reason Arendt considers that the education of children and adolescents should not be carried out by limiting their experiences to their own world but rather in a situation of co-existence with the adults who are educating them. For this reason in a controversy with pragmatist and progressive educators Arendt maintains that the objective of education for children and adolescents is not limited to developing their abilities but requires the study of substantive subjects which consist of a mixture of fragments of the adult world which they will inherit in time and which they must understand "just as it is". For this reason the educational experience should not take play as its model but rather a mixture of play and work with the latter in increasingly large measures since the pupils must get used to the effort that is needed both to preserve and modify the adult world and to overcome the forces which oppose this effort.

Arendt's interpretation is profound but unsatisfactory in so as far as it overestimates the importance of education as learning about a world for which the new generation is becoming responsible and by implication underestimates the importance of education as distancing from this world by a generation which is still not totally responsible for it and which may even refuse to be so.

These two aspects of education as learning and as distancing affect it at all levels. For this reason already in general education there should be a place for education for distance to the everyday world (a need which otherwise has traditionally been meet in various ways including that of fairy tales in early childhood). This same aspect is one which should be developed considerably and take on it own form when passing from one stage of education to another up until higher education when this aspect should become predominant.

Adolescents begin to be treated as adults on crossing a threshold which is defined in conventional and different ways at different times and places. They are considered to be civilly and criminally responsible. They are granted the corresponding rights and civic duties. They can become soldiers and be made to give up their lives for their country. It is supposed that they are capable of accepting family responsibilities as mothers and fathers to children. They are offered the opportunity of entering the economic system as salaried or self-employed workers or businessmen.

At this time they are also offered an alternative. They can choose direct entry into the world of adults or they can take a detour before arriving at this world, temporarily placing themselves in a "liminary community" (Turner 1974) so setting out on a singular and in a certain way contradictory, rite of initiation. On one hand they will pass through a hybrid experience between that of an adolescent without their own resources and dependant on a family or social allowance and that of adults. On the other hand education will give them the opportunity to see the world of adults from a distance and to enter it at a later date presumably under better conditions.

Therefore there is deep-running continuity between the two educational levels, general and higher, as both education for responsibility for the world and education for distance from it (and the lack of responsibility towards it) form part of both these levels (although not to the same extent or in the same way). So at the end of the educational process as a whole it should be clear for the student

that the world has not been given to them (contrary to what Arendt thought) but only proposed. Education does not insert them in a tradition but leaves them in a landscape where there is a range of traditions and where they have to find their niche and path. This state of availability of the student should become clearer in the later stage of their education, in higher education, although it should never be totally absent in earlier stages.

1. Education for what: the objectives of the order of freedom and of the *societas cupiditatis*.

In an ideal view education should be focussed on succeeding in preparing students to take part in a world in which the basics are preserved while at the same time all and each of its parts are continually being modified to adapt them to circumstances. What is this ideal world which it to be preserved and modified in this way? Everyone will answer this question as he feels fit. In my case I will take as my starting point a proposition whose content I will describe briefly but which I am not going to justify here.

I start from the assumption that the ideal world of our modern western societies are founded on two sets of values: the values of the order of freedom and the values of a type of *societas cupiditatis* in which the pursuit of the three objectives of wealth, power and honour are carried out in a way which is compatible with the maintenance of the order of freedom.

An order of freedom

To the extent to which societies try to reach, in a more or less approximate way, the values of an order of freedom, *to the same extent* the educational system should ensure an educational experience which helps to achieve a society of free people and responsible citizens with the corresponding knowledge, capacity of judgement, mental habits and moral attitudes.

If the educational system aims to achieve an order of freedom with the corresponding political system this involves two things. Firstly, education for both individual freedom and for an order of freedom. This means ensuring an education planned in such a way that individuals are capable of exercising their freedom, are prepared to do so and are respectful of others' freedom. This involves an education to live within an institutional structure which makes this exercise of freedom possible and which includes among other elements that of an open market economy.

Secondly, this means an education directed at strengthening "the city", that is to say a relationship between the citizens and politicians in which a limited, responsible public authority as well as a robust public sphere is established. It is a question of educating responsible citizens who are capable of selecting and retaining relevant information about public affairs, making a reasonable judgement on them and communicating this to everyone else so forming part of a community of conversation. This is the only way to be able to judge the political leaders, chose them reasonably and remove them from power at the right time. If not the people run the risk of becoming an emotional, impetuous mass at the mercy of demagogic politicians.

The societas cupiditatis: *first thoughts.*

To the extent to which it can be observed that the huge majority of the members of our western societies, as *societates cupiditatis,* are determined to improve their wealth (and their standard of living), their power and their honour (or social esteem), and *to the extent* to which the pursuit and achievement of these undertakings are compatible with the order of freedom mentioned earlier, the conclusion can be drawn that *to the same extent* the right education is the one which prepares people to be "people of this world", and active members of the economy, politics and the social life under present circumstances.

It should be noted that I am not making any pronouncements on the significance which each person wants to ultimately attribute to our western type of *societas cupiditatis*. In fact one of the characteristics of our free societies is that there is no hierarchy which we are bound to submit to and we are even less bound to submit to the hierarchy of the majority of members of the society in question.

So for example, for someone like Pascal, giving oneself up heart and soul to the desire for wealth, power and glory is nothing less than to get lost in an operation of divertissement or distraction from what truly matters; although, as we are in this world, neither is there good reason to totally despise the ways of the world provided that the centre of our attention is devoted to the relationship with God (Pascal 1950 [c.1658]: 64 and ff.). For someone like Schopenhauer letting ourselves be carried away by

our desires can only lead us to expect a higher measure of suffering. Therefore it is better to avoid doing this if we can, or if we really cannot it is advisable to adopt at least some prudent rules to reduce our involvement in the world and minimize the disaster (Schopenhauer 1988 [1851]). For Nietzsche, an attitude of "yes to life" and a will to live it to the full open up a potentially limitless horizon of desires to be realized and of freedom to be exercised, which is not an obstacle to applying prudent rules of "wisdom and self-defense", aimed at avoiding situations in which one is forced to use up energy by continually saying "no" or to reign in or inhibit the capacity for initiative (Nietzsche 1979 [1888]: 63-64). For a trappist monk, for an anarchist, for an individual possessed by the instinct for economic acquisition or the instinct of political power, the hierarchy of valuable objectives in life may be very different.

However, the fact is that the actual behaviour of the majority of the people (including the so-called elites) in our western societies reveals a hierarchy of preferences organized around the values of wealth, political power and social honour, which is expressed through a kind of *communis opinio* which establishes "the recognized routes to success in this world"; even though there are recluses, artists, philosophers, religious spirits and many other individuals from the most varied professions who do not recognize them as such and (probably for very good reasons) scorn them.

Education of a societatis cupiditatis *under present conditions*

If the educational system should aim for the achievement of the objectives of a *societas cupiditatis* compatible with an order of freedom *under present conditions,* this effects the way of education is to be prepared for people so that they take part in the economy, society, and politics.

To start with it is a question of establishing an education in keeping with economic life orientated towards growth, that is to say, an indefinite increase in production and of the levels of income and well-being under the conditions of the time. The usual discourse for these purposes is as follows. People usually sing the praises of education for continual innovation which is coherent with the tendency of a market economy which is moving in the direction of a economy of knowledge. An effort is made to educate people capable of understanding this tendency and prepared to respond to the challenges

of globalization and the so-called service orientation of the economy and to insert themselves in the processes of the production of goods and services of a higher and higher quality and which include contributions from science and technology. As well as this it should be added that a growing section of public opinion in western countries introduce the important proviso that this growth should be "sustainable", in other words it should respect the environment.

After (and in line with the above) it is a question of getting an education aimed at encouraging an experience of employment as permanent learning. The objective is to educate people capable of understanding that employment and educational opportunities are becoming more and more closely linked, that relatively stable, quality jobs with high incomes are related to higher levels of education, and that, on the other hand the probabilities of unemployment and precarious, low-quality jobs with low incomes are considerably higher with lower levels of education.

Furthermore, it seems necessary to set up a system of education in keeping with the objective of achieving a reasonably high level of social cohesion. Students must be able to understand that social cohesion diminishes if the social gap between one segment and another is widened excessively and in particular the gap between well-educated people and people with a low level of education, and that in the long term this has negative consequences not only for the economy but above all for maintaining an order of freedom.

Implicit in the previous objective is that of achieving a type of education which promotes the development of an articulation of feelings of collective identity with different intensity and scope. Leaving to one side the traditional feelings of local patriotism and the feeling of belonging to churches, professional communities or other similar groups (whose importance is tending to increase), there are two or three great collective identities linked to a territory which should be set out: patriotism and civil (or civilized) nationalism which expresses the bond to a political community; possibly a feeling of supra-nationalism like that which could be felt in for example Europe: and another with an even greater, more cosmopolitan or universal extension which could possibly include the whole world.

For the moment (and this moment may last a long time), civil nationalism in reference to a

political community seems to occupy a central position in this picture of collective identities. This is why it is in this field where the expediency of a type of education which prepares people for the political life, that is to say, the life of the *polis,* is being put forward with particular insistence. Therefore it is a question of educating people who are capable of understanding the principles of sensible public policies (economic, social, educational, international), and prepared (eventually) to support them. This involves education which fosters a willingness to defend an order of freedom in people and, at the same time, to take on some collective objectives of the community in question to a certain extent and in a reasonable way. The latter supposes education directed at developing the necessary capacities in people for them to participate in an extensive, continuous debate on the definition of the contents and the scope of the so-called national interests.

2. The supremacy of liberal education in the university

Universities have been and still are the central pieces in higher education system at least in most societies of the West. The university has arisen as an association of teachers and pupils recognized by the public authorities, which gives it certain privileges supposedly in exchange for the functions or tasks which it should fulfil. The privileges can go from the simple recognition of academic awards (as for example in the United States) to the recognition of awards which are qualifications to exercise a profession (which happens in Europe).

The western university has a long, complicated history behind it (even more so than the nation states). It has been and still is a very varied experience, with many variants. Many educative objectives and ideologies not to mention forms of organization have been revealed in the university. However, it is possible to construct an ideal type which serves on one hand as an analytical reference to understand these variants better and on the other hand as an ideal standard for the tasks at hand.

This ideal type is not a necessary outcome of history, in this case western history. History knows nothing of necessary developments. As Michael Oakeshott points out "in an historian's understanding of events none is accidental and none is necessary or inevitable" (1991a:172). The historian "knows about the event as an intelligible occurrence.... as an intelligible convergence of

decisions and human actions" (*Ibidem*: 172). Universities, like any other institution or association, have been and are only "intelligible occurrences". So the definition of the tasks of the university in a typical-ideal discourse is simply a proposal for a plan of intelligibility and a standard which we apply, from our particular situation, to the diversity of past and present historical experiences.

The typical-ideal definition I am proposing is a variant on the one that was traditional in academic and political circles of the last century. In effect, there seems to be a (relative) consensus in attributing three fundamental tasks to the universities that may be at least compatible with achieving the ultimate goals of an order of freedom and a societas cupiditatis. These tasks would be to give a liberal education, provide a professional education and contribute towards the development of knowledge and in particular scientific knowledge[1]. In my opinion the first of these tasks is the most important by a long chalk and qualifies or colours the others. By this I mean that liberal education should aim to fulfil, directly and deliberately, the objective of education for distance, or freedom in relation to the world and for this reason this should be the key element of university education. This liberal component should then substantially affect both professional education and scientific research which are characteristic of higher university education.

According to this interpretation, the university takes on a mixture of liberal and utilitarian ideals in the following way. Firstly it takes on the "non-utilitarian" ideal of a liberal education aimed at the education of free people who, as such, have a "habit of mind" (as John Henry Newman said: 1947 [1852]:90) and certain traits of a moral character consistent with the order of freedom. Secondly, the university incorporates the "utilitarian" ideal of a professional education although this is combined with (tacit or explicit) liberal elements such as the values of distance in relation to the political, economic and social powers of the time, of truth and respect for the criteria of the corresponding science and the expert practice of the profession in question and of the vocation of serving the community. Finally, scientific research in the university should

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[1]A classic reference to this traditional division of the function or tasks of the university is Ortega y Gasset (1930). The suggestion for a fourth function for regulating the social structure can found in Pérez-Díaz (1987:270 and ff.)

respond to an ideal mixture of "liberal" and "utilitarian" components, as it should be directed towards the development of knowledge as a value in itself and at the same time as an instrument to serve the project of a *societas cupiditatis* concerned with the reasonable control and exploitation of the world.

What does liberal education as education for distance signify?

The function of education which consists of developing the capacity of distance in relation to the world around us is the same as creating a field of freedom in relation to the world. So it seems fitting to call the corresponding education a "liberal education", not so much because it refers to people who are already free (or because, as Casiodoro suggests because it is a reference to people "of books (*Libri*)" whose reading and re-reading could contribute to making them free; Garin 1968: 53), but rather because it is an education which is to a large extent aimed at making them free (even freer) people.

As I have stated earlier, at the very moment of passage from adolescent to adulthood there is an alternative between a life project which involves the immediate immersion in adult life (normally) to satisfy the corresponding desires for wealth, power and honour and a more complex life project whose immediate step is a detour on the way to achieving (perhaps) the same objectives. The detour has an economic cost and perhaps even an immediate psychological cost, compensated by an experience which is satisfying in itself and by the expectations of economic advantages in the long term. The opportunity for getting a paid job is lost and it is necessary to live on the family or government grants and in a situation of total or partial dependence. In exchange the student receives a professional education which will allow him to become integrated into the labour market at a later date probably under much more advantageous conditions and at the same time to have the opportunity (in principle) to obtain a wide liberal education.

In principle, thanks to this liberal education, the student finds that just as he is drawing near the entrance to the door to the world, with one hand on the handle instead of opening it and plunging in to use it pragmatically he has the possibility of holding back, taking a break in life and making the most of the opportunity to look the world through a window, at a certain distance.

In this distance and space the university appears as the place in which (from a typical-ideal point of view) not merely instruction but "education" is given. For Michael Oakeshott this education "is the process of learning, in circumstances of direction and restraint, how to recognize and make something of ourselves... it is a two-fold process in which we enjoy an initiation into what for want of a better word I will call a 'civilization', and in doing so discover our own talents and aptitudes in relation to that civilization... a civilization (and particularly ours) may be regarded as a conversation being carried on between a variety of human activities, each speaking with a voice, or in a language of its own; the activities (for example) represented in moral and practical endeavour, religious faith, philosophic reflection, artistic contemplation and historical or scientific inquiry and explanation..."(Oakeshott 1991b: 187). The outcome should be an individual who is capable, prepared and used to conversing in the different languages of the corresponding activities. From here it can be inferred that the individual educated in this way should be used to not letting himself be shut up inside any of them but rather to keeping a certain distance from all and each of them.

This idea of a multiple conversation and of the distance which such a conversation entails is close to the core thoughts of Newman which he developed in his "*The idea of a University*", at the time of founding the University of Dublin in the mid-nineteenth century.

Based on an ancient university tradition which he identifies with the tradition of Oxford University, Newman considers that education at university should be directed at fulfilling the ideal of what he called a *gentleman* (Newman 1947 [1852]: 137 and ff., XXVIII). To mark the difference Newman insists that "education is a higher word" (Ibidem, 128: 101) and should not be confused with mere utilitarian professional training. For this purpose the characteristic product of education is a habit of mind, "a philosophical habit" (*Ibidem:* 90). What the habit produces in the subject is "the force, the steadiness, the comprehensiveness and the versality of intellect", in contrast to others that "are hopelessly obstinate and prejudiced..., so intemperate and intractable that there is no greater calamity for a good cause than that they should get hold of it" (*Ibidem:* XXXIII and XXXIV).

Such education is directed at developing the capacity of judgement, judgement being a source of energy and intellectual activity, a formative power

(*Ibidem:* 118). "Judgement is the master-principle of business, literature, and talent, which gives (the person) the strength in any subject he chooses to grapple with, and enables him to seize the strong point in it" (*Ibidem:* 154). The acquisition of judgement brings with it intellectual excellency, widening horizons and the enlightenment of the mind, and other qualities inherent in extensive knowledge (*Ibidem*: 107) and its final outcome and this is the key of Newman's reasoning, the formation of a rational (autonomous) person and not part of a machine (*Ibidem*. 148-149).

His reasoning is directed against utilitarians who focus their interest on an instrumental education for a job or profession. This instrumental education is the stand of the representatives of the Scottish universities to whom Newman is referring[2]. In contrast to them, Newman insists on the virtue of a liberal education in which the cultivation of knowledge is an end in itself, just as health can be cultivated as an end in itself (*Ibidem:* 145) and therefore a different end from the ends of power, wealth and honour which might be attained through it. A liberal education would be, from this point of view, independent of any sequel or consequence (*Ibidem*: 95,97).

This independence of education in relation to its effects, this kind of inconsequence should be understood as a reaffirmation of a classical theme of our western tradition which can also be found (in different formats) in other cultures. This is the theme of the formation of the autonomy of human beings which Confucius refers to when he says that "an educated man is not a utensil to be used". In this conception of things, education should contribute towards providing us with a distance, a freedom, against a world which is not given to us but proposed. This distance opens a space which permits us to place the world of here and now in a wider time sequence and to compare it with alternative possibilities. It may also permit us to put drives towards the world, characteristic of our western *societas cupiditatis,* in second place and to develop our sensibilities in order to become witnesses and perhaps "shepherds" of the endless reality of the human experience, life and the whole of the being (in the words of Heidegger in his *Letter on humanism"* and the philosophy of his final years: 1993 [1948]).

The space I am referring to is not only the interior space of each student but also a public space where young people can meet up and talk with people of different ages and with the written legacy of past generations (books which can make us free)[3]. In this sphere the humanist dream can come true (already anticipated in the Carolingian Renaissance) (Garin 1968:51) of the link between *ratio et oratio* or the aspiration of Giambattista Vico to reach harmony between wisdom, prudence and eloquence (Vico 1993 [1699/1703].

The development of the *ratio* refers not only to that of the learning itself but above all to that of certain of the students' skills: to the willingness to think in an objective, balanced way, to observe and experiment, to imagine explanations and to see the pros and cons, to patiently follow up the causal nexus of things and to do all this in a community of conversation. For this reason it is necessary to educate individuals prepared for an open, critical and self-critical discussion (Popper 1976).

This type of discussion should not bring back the method of disputes of the late scholastics with their tendency towards verbal hair-splitting (condemned by the humanists and moralists at the beginning of modernity, such as Vives, Rabelais or Montaigne: Garin 1968: 142-194; Durkheim 1982 [1904/1905]: 227-284) and their propensity (if I may use theatrical terms) to argumentative "overacting" which covers up an irrational, dogmatic vehemence. On the contrary, as William Warren Bartley III has quite rightly pointed out, the willingness to distance ourselves from our own theories, understood to be mere conjectures prone not to be justified but only falsified and provisionally corroborated, is linked to the habit of accompanying all our attempts at understanding things with the Popperian question par excellence, "under what conditions would this theory be false?" (1990: 254).

This question, posed *urbi et orbi,* puts us in the position of waiting for an answer which could come from any angle. *Ratio et oratio,* or *sapientia et eloquentia* would be inseparably linked because that question is posed to a community (or a series of communities) and because the development of knowledge as well as cognitive ability (and first of all the ability of knowing how to ask) in the students is

[2]An echo of Newman's polemic with the Scottish utilitarians can be found in the pages of *The Economist* entitled "Survey universities", in the edition of October 4th 1977, in which the magazine editors take a position close to that of the utilitarians.

[3]But which can also be a hinderance to our freedom as Nietzsche reminds us (1979 [1888]: 64).

carried out in the framework of conversation which requires the cultivation of the art of communication and a rhetoric ability.

A conversation, which in principle encompasses everything and persists in exploring the foundations and boundaries of the world, involves a universal and irrepressible curiosity. For this reason liberal education is directed at educating people only partly adapted to their time and place.

At the start of his reflections on the *History of Education and Pedagogical doctrines* (centred on the French experience), Durkheim criticises his contemporaries' obsession with turning the students into "men of their times", and favours a wider focus considering not the man of each moment but the man "in the whole of his future" and even taking into account not only his past history but also revising this history, something which did not take place but which could have done (Durkheim 1982 [1904/1905]. Ultimately Durkheim's position on this leads in the same direction as the reflections made earlier on liberal education and it concurs with them. Since if we understand history as a repertoire of possibilities its study frees us from its weight on us and leaves us relatively "available" for the present. For this reason from the point of view of the ideal character of a liberal education, education is to make men of their time which precisely because they are so, are not completely so.

Considering that time involves continual change, diversity, death and renewal of the world, fidelity to the world and the capacity to act effectively in it involve distance and in a certain way infidelity in relation to the world in its present state. Perhaps for this reason Schopenhauer suggested that it was a bad start for the moral and intellectual character of a young person if he knew too well and too early how to manage in the maelstrom and business affairs of life and felt in his element in them acting as if he had been "born knowing" (Schopenhauer 1988 [1851]: 307).

3. The ideal type, names and things

It may happen that the universities anywhere at anytime, even though formally recognizing the ideal of the liberal education and even though they call themselves and claim to be liberal universities, are not.[4] This has often happened, it is happening now

and will happen in the future. Various strategies can be adopted against this, one minimalist, another maximalist and a third more prudent.

The minimalist strategy would consider the immediate battle against entrenched interests around the so-called universities to be lost but would either make an effort to contribute towards a strategic victory for its "ideal university" in the long term or bear witness to the truth before a *deus absconditus*. This minimalist strategy would be a way of not wasting time and energy on verbal battles. A new name is chosen for educational institutions which provide a liberal education and meet professional and scientific objectives with complete rigour, without letting themselves be contaminated by the tendency to increase the size of educative organizations nor by the explosions of information and of academic publications (which have little to do with the development of knowledge and even less with liberal education). Educative experiments are carried out on ground protected from the noise and agitation of the environment, making the most of the fact that this environment is perhaps too taken up with itself to prevent the experiments. The minimalist strategy avoids the direct confrontation with the all too powerful coalition of created interests (civil servants, teachers, politicians, parents and students) and eludes the attempt to counteract the inertia of the institutions.

Perhaps those who adopt this minimalist strategy allow themselves to be moved by the fear of possible consequences of the opposite strategy, that is to say the maximalist strategy of those who are determined to modify things in the short term when historic circumstances are wholly unfavourable. Supporters of the minimalist view fear that what will happen to the rigorous and purist reformers is something similar to what Socrates tells Glaucon in book VII of the *Republic* happened to those who having come out of the caves and having seen things by the light of day and understood what they are really like, return to their cave and try to persuade their former companions of darkness that what they consider things themselves are only shadows cast by the objects which in turn mimic the things. And what happens to them, recalls Socrates, is that their former

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[4]This usually happens with quite a few continental European universities which, in their present form, originally derived from the French model, sometimes

called the "Napoleonic". It is a model of university aiming to providing a professional education in the relevant faculties which relegate liberal education to a preliminary phase (that of Baccalauréat in grammar schools) or to specific faculties or schools (such as the "Ecole Normale"). With time these university have become massified and reduced their standards.

companions, first incredulous and then angry, attach and them kill them in one way or another (Plato 1973 [IV century B.C.]: 749).

However, the simple fact that we reject a maximalist strategy as risky and costly (hoping to avoid an attack against philosophy) does not in itself bind us to a minimalist strategy. Sometimes it happens that *in medio virtus.* For this reason there is cause to advocate a prudent strategy which adheres to the principles but takes into account the circumstances of their application. If a moderate strategy is adopted it is necessary to blend local experiments with a participation in the public sphere attempting to "reform things" which is to say university institutions which do not correspond to the ideal of a liberal education. Such a strategy should be based on a specific analysis of each case (its history, its institutional structure, its internal organization, its environment), this, however, is not an obstacle to making some quite general reflections on this question.[5]

Calling things by their name? The problems of the "so-called university"

A moderate strategy (at least in its form) may start by weighing up the pros and cons of following Confucius's advice when he said that all reform should begin with "a rectification of names" and by taking up Cardinal Newman's invitation to "call things by their name" (Newman 1947 [1852]: 127).

At first view it would seem to be a persuasive invitation as the difference between the true university which corresponds to the ideal and another which does not is considerable. For Newman a "so-called university" (*Ibidem, 128*) only provides a professional education while a "true university" takes care of the aspects of a liberal education and concentrates on the cultivation of intelligence and the powers associated with it.

At the same time the cultivation of intelligence requires an intellectual community made up of mutual esteem and understanding. Where this does not exist this cultivation is impossible. This is why Newman insists that "the cultivation of the intellect... which never will issue from the most strenuous efforts of a set of teachers, with no mutual sympathies and no inter-communion , of a set of examiners with no opinions which they dare profess, and with no

common principles, who are teaching or questioning a set of youths who do not know them, and do not know each other, on a large number of subjects, different in kind, and connected by no wide philosophy, three times a week....." (Newman 1947 [1852]: 130-131). And we could add that if an unconnected collection of teachers and students is not a true university neither is that educative organisation whose fundamental internal connection is that of a confederation of bodies and academic associations which act as pressure groups to protect their control over the disciplines and to obtain economic support (Bartley III 1990: 201).

Both a university which is a collection of unconnected individuals and one which is a collection of interest groups contradict the ideal of an intellectual community involved in a conversation which closely resembles a "market of ideas", where the truth and interest of the ideas in question are continually being put to the test. Quite to the contrary the "so-called university" (of the "unconnected" type or the "interest group" type), by hindering the fulfilment of this objective, tends to produce intellectual regression or stagnation or a development of knowledge far inferior to that which would have been possible.

The "so-called university" reduces the probability of a "cultivation of intelligence" in as much as it favours the diffusion of pathological experiences "microscopic" but decisive for the intellectual development of the students. Charles Sanders Pierce was alluding to these basic experiences when he exclaimed: "it is terrible to see how a single unclear idea, a single formula without meaning, lurking in a young man's head, will sometimes act like an obstruction of inert matter in an artery, hindering the nutrition of the brain, and condemning its victim to pine away in the fullness of his intellectual vigor and in the midst of intellectual plenty" (Bartley III 1990: 156).

In conclusion, the problem with the "so-called universities" is that they claim to be universities and are just the opposite and their effects may be very serious. Added to this is the problem that these are not organizations whose poor operation will guarantee their demise but only a certain irrelevance.

In fact, what could happen to the "so-called universities" is similar to the fate of many other "organizations which permanently fail": which survive because they manage to immunize themselves against the pressures of the environment (Meyer and Zucker 1989), although it should be recognized that the survival of an organization "with permanent failure"

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[5]And which could serve as a starting point or reference for specific analyses and consequent proposals.

means that it survives sheltered in a niche and at the edge of historic processes. It would not be the first time this happens. In Europe in the 16th to 18th centuries progress not only in the humanities but also in the sciences (as Durkheim stated (1982 [1904/1905]:214) passed along routes outside the university and liberal education itself found its place outside the university in contact with an attentive, restless public which did not need the mediation of this institution to accede to culture and science.

The conditional and transitory use of names

Should we deduce from the previous point that to avoid the course of events an attempt at (moderate) reform should include a "rectification of names" so that the "so-called universities" stop calling themselves universities? Should we even entrust this task to an accreditation committee which one would suppose could just as well "discredit" as "accredit" the universities in question?

My answer to both questions is negative, basically because I understand that a reform strategy either attempts to be effective or it is not a reform strategy but rather on expression of desires and I understand that the refusal to attribute the name of university to the "so-called universities" would, in general, have a negative effect on their reform.

It is necessary to bear in mind that the attribution of names to institutions and organizations is not always or only a subject of conventional stipulations but frequently affects the way we handle these same things practically. Many people's resistance to changing the name of institutions which they are used to calling universities is linked to deeply-rooted feelings of identity, self-esteem and social esteem. In general to deny or ignore them would be counterproductive and would have the effect of hardening the opposition to whatever reforms people might want to introduce.

On the other hand, the attribution of the name university to the "so-called universities" by society in general and not by any committee may be justified as an act of confidence (tacit or expressed) which is carried out conditionally and provisionally. [6] The

attribution of the title would be like an act by which society awarded the university with a credit in anticipation of the future state of things (the state of a "true university") which the "so-called university" would be invited to recognize as an objective they wished to reach and a reference model to which they were to draw closer. The title of university would be attributed to them on the condition that they should pay tribute to the ideal, attempt to make it come true and start out on a process of transition towards its realization.

In this way, thanks to the "white lie", or the "pious fiction" of the anticipated, conditional and transitory attribution of the title of university to the "so-called universities", the idea of the liberal university could operate as a regulating concept for the process of change for the universities which really exist. In any case, this idea of the liberal university could always operate as a reference point for experiments in the field of liberal education, scientific research and professional teaching which are frequently carried out outside the universities.

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[6]This would be a spontaneous and informal attribution from the society consisting of the recognition of the qualifications awarded by these institutions as "(academic) university qualifications". This involves making a clear distinction between these qualifications and those which authorize the exercise of a profession

("professional qualifications"), which could be awarded by *ad hoc* committees or professional institutions with the backing from public authorities. Making this distinction entails a radical change in the institutional framework of the university, and the relationships between the university, society and the state in countries whose systems of higher education have more or less followed the French or "Napoleonic" model.

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